

## Super Titles

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If someone were to tell you that he was in the REUSED METAL PRODUCTS INDUSTRY, it would probably take you a while to figure out that he was a *junk dealer*. "Super titles" are becoming increasingly prevalent as the lust for a burnished image dominates any interest in the substance it obscures.

Sometimes, super-titling is simple euphemism, wherein the distasteful becomes acceptable, as in UNDERFASHIONS for *underwear* (itself a euphemism). In this way, *sexual intercourse* emerges as CONJUGAL RELATIONS. We can soften the harshest realities, such as *nuclear missiles*, simply by calling them FACTORS OF PEACE (for the good guys) or INSTRUMENTS OF AGGRESSION (for the bad guys). The super title may be totally unrecognizable without its referent by its side, as when we call a *bar of soap* a BEAUTY CAKE. "Euphemism," quoth H. W. Fowler, "is more demoralizing than coarseness."

In a recent issue of *The New Yorker* there was a story about a man hired by an oil company to take complaints over the telephone. On his first day, he jotted down a customer's complaint about an oil burner that had exploded. It was his boss who then exploded: "You won't get far in this business until you learn that we do *not* have explosions. We have PUFFBACKS." It is this sort of mentality that gives us MEMORIAL GARDEN for *graveyard*, HOME ENTERTAINMENT CENTER for *radio-phonograph combination*, and PRESENTATION SESSION for *class*.

The death industry is especially replete with super titles. MORTICIANS<sup>1</sup> place LOVED ONES<sup>2</sup> in CASKETS<sup>3</sup> for INTERMENT<sup>4</sup>. (Incidentally, and quite beside the point, there is an Indianapolis undertaker who advertises that his coffins come with a "lifetime guarantee"!)

*People*, in the hands of bureaucrats, become PERSONNEL, who don't *live* anywhere, but are DOMICILED. *Old people* have become SENIOR CITIZENS, and the *poor*, when they are mentioned at all, are merely UNDER-PRIVILEGED. We are no longer *fired* from our jobs; we are TERMINATED.

Perhaps you managed to hold on to your marbles through the TV meet-

1 = undertakers; 2 = dead persons; 3 = coffins; 4 = burial

ings of the UN during the MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT<sup>5</sup>. Did you notice the all-time record number of polite synonyms for *lie* and *liar*? It was a marvel of semantic gymnastics. Some members groped and stammered for minutes at a time, searching for new ways in which to call their ESTEEMED COLLEAGUES<sup>6</sup> liars. Here are some of the astounding results: UTTERANCE WITHOUT FOUNDATION IN FACT; UNFOUNDED STATEMENT; MISREPRESENTATION OF THE TRUE FACTS (and we hadn't even suspected the existence of *untrue* facts!); COMPLETE FABRICATION; WOVEN FROM WHOLE CLOTH (Ambassador Goldberg's favorite); and UTTERLY WITHOUT RELATION TO REALITY. In all fairness, we must mention that Lord Caradon alone used the words *lie* and *liar* when characterizing the statements and speakers with which and with whom he disagreed. GODFREY DANIEL! (as W. C. Fields often said in order to circumvent the movie censor's ruling against profanity).

Just as the *undertaker* elevates himself to a MORTICIAN, so does the *gardener* become a LANDSCAPE TECHNICIAN, the *tax collector* a REVENUE AGENT, the *plumber* a WATER SYSTEMS SPECIALIST, and the *film projectionist* a MULTI-MEDIA SYSTEMS TECHNICIAN. We no longer have *janitors*; we now employ SANITATION MAINTENANCE SUPERINTENDENTS. If a limb of one of your trees is sagging, don't bother to look in the Yellow Pages for a *tree trimmer*; look rather under HORTICULTURAL SURGEONS. Remember when Art Carney used to get a laugh on the Jackie Gleason Show by describing himself as a SUBTERRANEAN SANITATION TECHNICIAN? It's no laughing matter any more; just call City Hall some time and ask for the help of a *sewer worker*—they won't know what you're talking about.

While you're on the line to City Hall, you might ask about the *dogcatcher*: you'll learn that he's now the CANINE CONTROL OFFICER. And did you know that policemen no longer carry *clubs*? No sirreebob! That long, wooden, blunt instrument is a NIGHT BATON! Joining the *dogcatcher* in oblivion is the *barber*; in his place we now have a HAIR STYLIST. Should your stomach start to turn on your next plane trip, don't bother looking for the old *vomit bag*, because you won't find it; in its stead is something called an AIR SICKNESS CONTAINER. While on the subject of containers, we must mention the fact that there are many localities in which milk no longer comes in *bottles*, but in OPENIZED CARTONS, delivered with what is emblazoned on the truck's side as PERSONALIZED SERVICE. Oh, yes—the next time you are in the market for a *used car*, be careful. Some newspapers are advertising PRE-OWNED VEHICLES.

NASA's rocket fuel workers at Cape Kennedy recently wondered why they couldn't find the *portable field showers* at the supply depot with which to wash the rocket fuel from themselves. It was probably due to the fact that the Quartermaster had redesignated them as ROCKET PROPELLANT PERSONNEL NEUTRALIZERS.

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5 = Arab-Israeli War; 6 = fellow members

It is all a sad, even frightening, spectacle. We cannot close more appropriately than by quoting a line from G. M. Young: "Really there are times when I feel that civilization will come to an end because no one will understand what anybody else is saying."

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### SAY IT!

Do you enjoy the challenge of pronouncing difficult words?

If you can honestly answer that question in the affirmative, then we commend to your attention Duwamish, one of the Indian languages of the northwest Pacific Coast. Duwamish includes words such as BDTC D, BDTC DZ, DJDTCD, GWLGW, and GWLTS.

Start stuttering!

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### AMERICAN CITIES(?)

Where would you place PHILADELPHIA, ABILENE, MEMPHIS, and SYRACUSE?

In the United States? Not if you have any historical perspective. All of these are Bible names! PHILADELPHIA was a city in Lydia, named in the New Testament. ABILENE was a tetrarchy of Lysanias, also in the New Testament. MEMPHIS was the ancient capital of Egypt, mentioned in the Old Testament. SYRACUSE was the principal city of Sicily, named in the New Testament.

Better bone up on the Bible!

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### THE FOUR-WAY HETERONYM

Two words identical in spelling but different in sound and meaning are called "heteronyms." Thus, POLISH (to make smooth and glossy) and POLISH (pertaining to Poland) are heteronyms.

After much deliberation, we have decided to unveil, for the first time anywhere, what is probably the only four-way heteronym in existence: the word OS. Pronounced AHSS, it means a bone, also a mouth or an opening; pronounced OASS, it refers to a narrow ridge or mound of gravelly and sandy drift, deposited by a subglacial stream; pronounced OZE, it designates ciphers or zeroes; pronounced OWE-ESS, it is a verb defined as "to record the time of arrival and departure of a train by telegraphing this information in a certain manner."

Top this heteronym . . . if you dare!